

served our country, returned home, and helped the U.S. become the indispensable leader of liberty and freedom.

Many of us have family members who fought in World War II, including my uncle Pete, who served in the Army. Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, just over 1 million of them are still alive, with around 93,000 in my home State of California.

Seven decades later, we are rapidly losing this Greatest Generation, so it is of the utmost importance that we continue to show our gratitude and appreciation for their sacrifices by recording their oral histories, with Honor Flights, and by ensuring that they live their final years with dignity and respect—and we shall never forget.

As a Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am committed to ensuring that the 20 million veterans in the United States receive the care and benefits they have earned and deserve—for everyone who donned the uniform, from the World War II generation to the post-9/11 generation.

I thank the World War II veterans in Ventura County and across the country for the sacrifices they and their families made to serve our great Nation, and for protecting our liberty and freedoms, our democracy at home, and our allies abroad.

The example their generation has set for us of coming together as a Nation with a common purpose is one we continue to aspire to today and one my colleagues and I on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee emulate as we seek the best possible care for our veterans.

PECOS, TEXAS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GALLEGO) for 5 minutes.

Mr. GALLEGO. Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to continue my journey through the 23rd District of Texas and saddle up and ride along the Butterfield Trail to a place that is truly American, and that is the city of Pecos, Texas, home of the Eagles, the mighty purple and gold.

Pecos is on Forbes' Top 400 Fastest-Growing Small Towns list. Spurred by growth in agriculture, Pecos is the home of the sweetest cantaloupes—Pecos cantaloupes—grown anywhere in the country, and also of incredible growth in oil and gas, as Pecos is part of the Permian Basin.

Pecos can be found sitting quietly in rich tradition just outside the Chihuahuan Desert where the Pecos River flows. The formidable Pecos River was nearly impossible to ford at one time. But being intrepid citizens, Americans using their ingenuity explored and discovered several places of the river where they could cross, and they founded the city of Pecos.

The city of Pecos was established in the late 1800s, and with the arrival of the Texas Pacific Railroad in 1881, Pecos functioned as a transportation

hub and created something that was Texas tough, kind of a combination of a cowboy culture and a Hispanic culture that still thrives even today. Many outlaws like Bill Earhart and John Denson met their end in Pecos, messing with the Texas tough values of Pecos.

That combination of cultures encouraged competitiveness. As a result, the dusty air was filled with cowboys contending for bragging rights through friendly rivalries that would eventually lead to the first ever rodeo on July 4, 1883, in Pecos, Texas. The winner of many Pecos rodeos was that mythical person Pecos Bill, a man who legend says was raised by coyotes and can be found in many movies and many books.

Today, Pecos continues that longest-running annual rodeo. If you are lucky, perhaps you can catch a glimpse of Pecos Bill still carrying on that rich tradition of accomplishment, perhaps eating a cantaloupe—as I said, one of the fruits that that area is famous for.

I invite all to visit Pecos, to learn more about the culture, the beauty, the traditions of the 23rd District. I am certain you won't regret your visit to west Texas.

OAKLAND BENEFITS OFFICE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, as the secret waiting lists in veterans health care come to light more and more, I implore my colleagues to include the benefits administration in the VA as part of this investigation. I echo Chairman MILLER's statement from yesterday's hearing, where he told the witnesses: "Until VA understands that we are deadly serious, you can expect us to be looking over your shoulder every single day." Count on it.

I want the Oakland Regional Office to know that I, too, am serious and will continue to spend my time and that of my staff to correct the claims disaster crushing the veterans in my district. With the help of an ever-growing group of whistleblowers at the Oakland VA, we absolutely will be looking over their shoulder every single day.

Claim dates are concurrently being manipulated by the Oakland VA to improve their backlog statistics. This is a flagrant disregard of VA rules and contrary to the training received by every employee. Because of practices like these, thousands of veterans in my district are not even eligible for the secret health care waiting lists that we hear about, such as in Arizona. Their claims are still pending or summarily denied on technicalities prior to full consideration.

Many of these veterans have more than one claim unanswered. One man in my district has a 36-year-old claim, and a secondary claim appears to have been deliberately sidelined now for 212 days. Despite these facts, the Oakland

VA boasts that they have no claims over 125 days old. I meet veterans just like this man every day with claims that have gone on for years.

Thanks to a handful of dedicated VA employees working with my office, we have learned that these delays are an engineered disaster designed to control the VA budget in Oakland. By reducing the claim expenditures, Oakland's management has become eligible for bonuses, and received them. Withholding benefits for personal gain is perhaps the most despicable aspect of the VA scandals.

Veterans benefits are supposed to be a non-adversarial system. How can that be when employees have financial incentive not to process claims? Doesn't that explain the endless veteran claims with missing records and the staggering delays in processing? It is time to restore the VA to a veteran-centered system with real accountability.

Last Thursday, I made public the statements of whistleblowers regarding some 14,000 unprocessed claims at the Oakland office dating back to the '90s, as depicted in this poster. We have since heard that Oakland VA responded by sending a large number of these claims on a swift trip to Manila for "scanning." That is Manila, the Philippines. We don't know how many they have sent, and we don't really have an accountability for if they were actually sent at all.

After sitting untouched for years, the fastest process we have is scanning these files in the Philippines? How many of these veterans have given up on their claims or even died during this period? Were these veterans contacted to say their claims have been located?

Indeed, we hear that the budgeting in Oakland has actually gone for new desks, new furniture, and I have even heard spiffing up the director's suite with an ungraded or new restroom. We don't have money in the budget to buy a scanner so that the claims can be processed locally, we have to ship them out of the country? This is the response we get for some cases, almost 20-year-old claims sitting on a desk in a hallway at the Oakland VA. That is appalling.

On Tuesday morning, urgent phone calls came pouring into my office from Oakland employees who had been working with us who were unable to verify these files had actually been shipped. They feared that many of them had been destroyed or perhaps hidden once again in a janitor's closet or an elevator shaft somewhere.

I made repeated calls to the Oakland office that afternoon to check on this situation. Multiple calls to the interim director, Mr. Hackney, have gone unanswered, and we have yet, that I know of, to receive a response.

Every American should be appalled at this broken system. Mr. Speaker, it is time to expand our inquiries to the Veterans Administration as well to attack these problems from the bottom